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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002352

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SUBJECT: BOMBING MARKS RED MOSQUE OPERATION ANNIVERSARY

Classified By: Ambassador Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The latest suicide bombing on the one-year anniversary of the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) military operation in Islamabad demonstrates just how potent a symbol the mosque remains in the militants' battle with the Pakistani government. We believe the bombing was more a demonstration of still smoldering anger over the military operation than it was a signal of a renewed suicide bombing campaign against Pakistan. Along with the collapse of the Waziristan agreement in 2007, the storming of the Red Mosque sparked a bloody year in which over 600 Pakistanis were killed in suicide bombings. The Army and the new government's efforts to negotiate peace deals with militants and tribal leaders largely has been a reaction to this violence and an attempt to redirect militant anger it cannot contain away from Pakistan. End Summary.

Police Targeted

¶2. (U) A suicide bomber targeted security forces following a rally to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the Lal Masjid (Red Mosque) operation in Islamabad. The bomber specifically attacked a police contingent several hundred meters from the mosque, killing at least 19 people, including 14 police officers and injuring more than 50 people. Press reports quoted an explosives expert who assessed the locally-made bomb contained upwards of 17 pounds of explosives. The bombing mirrors a similar attack against police in the same area on July 27, 2007. The attacker executed the bombing outside the heightened security corridor arranged in anticipation of the rally. A police force ranging from 3,000-4,000, some from neighboring regions, provided security.

¶3. (C) The GOP made a conscious decision to allow the rally to go forward; unlike the peaceful lawyers' Long March protest, however, this one turned violent. The Ministry of Interior (MOI) has been widely criticized for its naiveté in believing it could control what was predictably going to be a problematic event. MOI is offering a 5 million rupee reward (USD 71,000) for information relating to the bomber. It has also announced a new policy of restricting demonstrations to certain pre-approved sites in Islamabad.

Threats of Anti-U.S./Musharraf Jihad

¶4. (SBU) Students attending the Red Mosque rally wore red

prayer caps in memory of deputy cleric Abdul Rashid Ghazi, who died in the raid. Rally speakers called for jihad against the U.S. and demanded that the Jamia Hafsa girls' Madrassah be rebuilt. A senior police official on July 7 asserted Umm Hassan, wife of Abdul Aziz and head of the demolished Jamia Hafsa, was preparing suicide bombers to attack President Musharraf. According to press reports, many in attendance called for the government to release Ghazi's brother and chief cleric Abdul Aziz, who security forces arrested when he fled the mosque disguised as a woman in a burqah. The Supreme Court has granted Aziz bail in all but one terrorist-related charge; on July 7, Aziz's lawyer petitioned the Court for bail on the remaining charge.

15. (C) Comment: Along with the collapse of the Waziristan peace agreements in 2007, the Red Mosque operation sparked an unprecedented spate of suicide attacks by militants, primarily against Pakistani security targets. The operation and its aftermath demonstrated for the first time how Islamic militancy had spread beyond the tribal areas into Pakistan proper. In a television address, President Musharraf flatly stated that Pakistan was now at war with the militants; the militants then displayed their power to respond. Since July 2007, approximately 600 persons have died in more than 70 suicide bombings in Pakistan. Efforts by the Army and the new government to renew discussions with militants and tribal leaders largely stems from the desire to again redirect militant operations away from Pakistan.

16. (C) Comment Continued: Last year's military operation continues to provoke debate. Liberals initially complained

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that Musharraf waited too long to oust militants from the heart of the capital; after the operation, they complained it had been too violent and questioned why it took 8 days for the military to complete its action. Families of those killed during the operation continue to believe there was a government cover up and that many thousands remain unaccounted for in unmarked graves. The GOP never fully responded to a Supreme Court demand to investigate the incident. During the political campaign, Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Nawaz Sharif repeatedly used the Red Mosque operation as an example of the anti-Islamic nature of the Musharraf regime. By itself, this latest bombing probably reflects the still smoldering anger over the operation at Lal Masjid; we have no indication it is connected to a decision by Baitullah Mehsud or others to re-launch suicide attacks across Pakistan. End Comment.

PATTERSON